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The Urban Spectacle: New York's Evolution in 70s and 80s Exploitation Cinema. A Critical Examination of How Gritty Narratives Reflect the City's Complex History and Identity

Frédéric Gimello-Mesplomb

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La ville postapocalyptique comme objet critique dans l'imaginaire nord-américain

Perspectives pluridisciplinaires

3 & 4 octobre 2024

Bâtiment M rez-de-chaussée
Salle M001

Université Jean Monnet
33 rue du 11 novembre,
42100 Saint-Étienne

Organisé par
Vincent Jaunas & Jonathan Tichit

Jeudi 3 octobre 2024

9h30 – 11h10

Panel 1. Devenirs urbains divergents.

Modération : Vincent Jaunas (Université Jean Monnet Saint-Etienne)

Dalibor Žíla (Université Masaryk de Brno, République Tchèque) :
« L’imaginaire de Montréal post-apocalyptique à travers trois romans québécois contemporains »

Julien Plouchart (CY Cergy Paris université) : « La représentation d’univers urbains nord-américains postapocalyptiques dans deux films des années 80 »

Frédéric Gimello (Université d’Avignon) : « New York dans le cinéma d’exploitation des années 70-80 : une représentation critique de la ville postapocalyptique au prisme du capitalisme décadent et de l’émergence du concept de post-modernité »

11h10 – 11h30

Pause Café

11h30 – 12h40

Panel 2. Technologies et intelligences artificielles.

Modération : Jocelyn Dupont (Université de Perpignan)

Julie Meyer (Université Jean Monnet Saint-Etienne) : « Liminal AI, ou la mise en image prospective de l’effondrement de la ville états-unienne »

Kevser Güngör (Université de Montréal et Université Paris 8) :
« Sauvegarder après la fin ? Les enfants artificiels comme berceaux, tombeaux et mémoriaux dans *Death Stranding* et *A.I. Intelligence artificielle* »

12h40 – 13h50

Pause Déjeuner

13h50 – 15h00

Panel 3. Traumatisme et survie.

Modération : Jonathan Tichit (Aix-Marseille Université)

Caroline Magnin (Université Paris-Est Créteil) : « Arpenter la ville de New-York dans le roman états-unien post 11-Septembre »

Danièle Méaux (Université Jean Monnet Saint-Etienne) :
« L’Amérique déchue de Laura Henno »

15h00 – 15h20

Pause Café

15h20 – 17h00

Panel 4. Enjeux politiques et postcoloniaux.

Modération : Anne-Sophie Letessier (Université Jean Monnet Saint-Etienne)

Clémence Dumon (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle) : « Le fantasme d’un monde en formation : revenir aux sources de l’imaginaire américain (*The Last of Us*) »

Yves Gardes (Université Rouen Normandie) : « Autonomies précaires et interdépendances vitales dans *Future Home of the Living God* de Louise Erdrich »

Capucine Rullière (University of California, Los Angeles et Ecole Normale Supérieure, Paris) : « Zeppelins fantômes et radios pirates : ELADATL (2021) à l’abordage de l’histoire coloniale de Los Angeles »

18h00–20h30

Projection-débat au cinéma Le Méliès

Le Monde, la Chair et le Diable (Ranald MacDougall, 1959)

20h30

Diner au Méliès Brasserie Café

Vendredi 4 octobre 2024

9h30 – 10h50 **Conférence plénière 1** (en anglais).
Robert Yeates (Université d'Okahama, Japon) : “Build a Better Day After”: Reclaiming Urban Space in the Post-Apocalypse”

10h50 – 11h10 **Pause Café**

11h10–12h50 **Panel 1. La ville, espace de catastrophe.**
Modération : Oscar Barnay (Université Jean Monnet Saint-Etienne)

Martin Barnier (Université Lumière Lyon 2) : « La ville post-apocalyptique américaine au cinéma. Parcours historique »

Arnaud Moussart (Université Jean Monnet Saint-Etienne) :
« *Dark Sun* : l'impossible eucatastrophe ? »

Rémi Dignonnet (Université Jean Monnet Saint-Etienne) :
« *Delirious New York* (Koolhaas, 1978), un manifeste post-apocalyptique pour Manhattan et pour l'Amérique ? »

12h50 – 14h00 **Pause Déjeuner**

14h00 – 15h20 **Conférence plénière 2.**
Irène Langlet (Université Gustave Eiffel)

15h20 – 15h40 **Pause Café**

15h40 – 17h20 **Panel 2. Perspectives éco-critiques.**
Modération : Aliette Ventéjoux (Université Rennes 2)

Joanne Vrignaud (Université Paris-Nanterre) : « La ville-déchet de *Wall-E* ou le paradoxe éco-critique de Disney »

Hubert Le Boisselier (Université Bordeaux Montaigne) :
« Proliférations, résurgences et inter-spécificité dans la ville post-apocalyptique de films de zombie. L'exemple de *The Last of Us* »

Jonathan Tichit (Aix-Marseille Université) :
« La ville en végétation ou le temps d'après »

17h20 – 17h30 **Remarques de clôture**

ORGANISATION

Vincent Jaunas, Université Jean Monnet Saint-Etienne
Jonathan Tichit, Aix-Marseille Université

Comité scientifique

Aliette Ventéjoux, Université Jean Monnet Saint-Etienne
Anne-Sophie Letessier, Université Jean Monnet Saint-Etienne
Oscar Barnay, Université Jean Monnet Saint-Etienne
Sophie Chapuis, Université Jean Monnet Saint-Etienne

LIEU

Université Jean Monnet
33 rue du 11 novembre
42100 Saint-Étienne

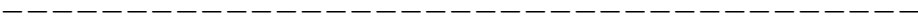
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The Urban Spectacle: New York's Evolution in 70s and 80s Exploitation Cinema

A Critical Examination of How Gritty Narratives Reflect the City's Complex History and Identity

Frédéric Gimello-Mesplomb (University of Avignon)

version submitted: February, 20th, 2024



Abstract:

This article explores the cultural and social impact of exploitation films set in New York during the 1970s and 1980s. To conduct this study, we focused on a sub-database of 75 movies made in and about New York between the 1970s and 2000s, all identified in the IMDB and Rottentomatoes databases. We extracted the content and examined the themes mentioned in the scripts and synopses, including justice; corruption; social isolation; social stratification such as race, ethnicity, class and gender; and the city's transformation. This article discusses how these films reflect the social tensions and sociological changes of the time and how they use New York as a symbol of existential struggles and identity crises. Additionally, we examine how legislation and social change affected New York's exploitation cinema and its reception.

Keywords: Exploitation movies, Gritty Films, NYC-based movies, Urban Challenges, Urban Sociology, Sociology of Cinema, Audience Reception, Audience Studies.

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1. An economic rationale: the rise of gritty movies

The exploitation film industry, with its focus on low-budget production for easy profit, reveals the significant role these films played in shaping public policies and attitudes toward cinema (Keil & Mosig, 2012); (Carter & Barber, 2017). Scholars such as Keil and Stamp (2004) and Church (2015) have explored this genre's historical and cultural significance, highlighting its impact on film fandom and the broader cinematic landscape. During the 1960s and 70s, neighborhood cinemas, commonly called grindhouses, showcased a continuous lineup of independent B-movies. These films, known for their gritty content, encompassed various subgenres such as blaxploitation, sexploitation, and kung fu exploitation, among others. The term "grindhouse film"¹ (or "gritty film"²) became synonymous with the movies screened in these venues, which were often produced and distributed for second or third-run drive-ins. As urban areas grew, requiring more space, these films found a new home in converted theaters. Independent production companies sometimes created extended versions of their films specifically for this alternative distribution network. New York City emerged as a prominent hub for this cinematic movement from the 1960s to the 1980s (Mendik & Schneider, 2002; Schaefer, 1999).

The late 1960s saw independent producers leveraging the dissolution of the Hays Code to introduce adult-only movies, attempting to rejuvenate the tradition of touring the United States. Faced with the challenge of recouping production costs outside the traditional exhibition circuit, they employed a managerial strategy that emphasized distinction without marginalization. The quest for quality, as discussed by King (2016) and Galt & Schoonover (2010), became a primary concern for these creators, who

¹ A variant on the legend of these venues sees the term's origin in the programming of these theaters, which used to offer cabaret shows such as *Bump and Grind*, hence the term *Grindhouse*.

² In this context, *gritty* is used to describe things that are dark and edgy. If a movie is *gritty*, that means it is violent, rough, depressing.

sought to differentiate their work from mainstream productions through unconventional themes, genres, and technical innovations. This pursuit of the forbidden and transgressive became a defining element of exploitation films, allowing them to carve out a niche in a competitive market.

Exploitation cinema's blatant disregard for societal norms and taboos, coupled with its unapologetic exploration of American society's "pressure points," particularly in urban settings, facilitated its development and subsequent fragmentation into various currents and sub-genres. This proliferation of exploitation films contributed to a belated form of cinephilia, which retrospectively valorized these films for their aesthetic qualities, often deemed "kitsch." Such posthumous appreciation, as noted by Jancovich et al. (2003) and Brottman (1997), has led to a reassessment of exploitation cinema's cultural and aesthetic value, with directors like Tarantino playing a significant role in this reevaluation process.

New York City, depicted as a metropolis of excess, served as an ideal backdrop for independent producers to explore and amplify the latent fears of its inhabitants³. The major themes prevalent across exploitation films set in this city reflect a complex interplay of social, cultural, and urban anxieties, further underscoring the genre's significance in the broader cinematic and cultural discourse. Through the works of scholars across film studies, cultural studies, and urban sociology, a nuanced understanding of the exploitation film industry's legacy and its enduring influence on cinema and society emerges.

³ Gimello-Mesplomb, F. (2009). Revisiting exploitation cinema through the 70-80s New York based movies: A sociological investigation into post-apocalyptic representations of government, justice, crime, and law. DOI: [10.13140/RG.2.1.3631.6882](https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.3631.6882)

2. NYC Geography of Justice

A recurring theme in NYC-based movies is the reference to the scale of values linking justice and morality in New York's social structure. The filmmakers' first target was the dysfunctions of local democracy, in particular, the corruption of big-city mayors and police directors. The 70s were marked by a wave of delinquency affecting all major American cities, leading to an unprecedented crisis of confidence among small property owners (and the massive purchase of firearms by private individuals), which largely explains the debacle of the Carter administration in the 1981 elections⁴. Films from this period paint a biting portrait of elected officials, portrayed as polite politicians ineffectual in the face of rising urban crime. The depiction of New York's chief magistrate is no exception. It's a case of middle-class New Yorkers taking the law into their own hands. In *Messenger of Death* (Jack Lee Thompson, 1988)⁵, the chief of the NYPD is introduced at a social gathering. At the dinner table, he announces his decision to run for mayor and seems to pay little heed to a phone call from one of his subordinates informing him of an assassination. A scathing "*I've already told you not to bother me over such a small matter*" seems to close this short telephone conversation before he resumes. In *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three* by Joseph Sargent (1974)⁶, a very similar situation occurs when the mayor - bedridden at home with the flu but immersed with relish in watching a game show - is extremely upset when his first deputy informs him by telephone of a large-scale hostage-taking in the New York subway.

The message conveyed by these caricatured situations is echoed in the wave of films known as "urban westerns," the best-known of which is undoubtedly *Coogan's Bluff* (Don Siegel, 1968). This film paved the way for this movement. In this production,

⁴ Kaspi et al, *American Civilization*, Paris, PUF, 2004, page 145.

⁵ Starring Charles Bronson, an actor who would go on to play numerous New York vigilante roles in the final years of his career, in independent films produced by the Cannon company headed by Yoram Globus and Menahem Golan.

⁶ This film served as the inspiration for Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), a film that uses color as the hostage-takers' code name.

Siegel, the pope of the serial Western, fires the themes in vogue at the end of the Sixties: Coogan, an Arizona sheriff's deputy, is sent to New York to pick up a convict. When he arrives at his destination, the local police tell him that the prisoner cannot be brought back because he has taken too much LSD, forcing him to be admitted to the hospital for detoxification - a theme generally banned from screens by the Hays Code.

The exploitation film flirts with morality but also splits the city's geography horizontally and vertically on two levels: social, with the dominated confined to the city's underground (subways, sewers, underpasses...), and racial (the plots of the most violent films use the theme of rampant anarchy linked to the ghettoization of specific neighborhoods). In *C.H.U.D.* (Douglas Cheek, 1985), a small science fiction horror film dealing with organ trafficking and radioactive waste, set against a backdrop of suspicious deaths⁷. The city is threatened by mutants - in reality, homeless people living in the sewers, victims of toxic products dumped there by unscrupulous entrepreneurs. Similarly, in *Street Trash* by Jim Muro (1986), a strange liquid of unknown origin dissolves the homeless people in a garbage dump. This pretext enables Douglas Cheek and Jim Muro to stigmatize two urban figures: firstly, the figure of the homeless person, clearly associated with insecurity; secondly, the excesses of pollution and poor hygiene in large American cities. The exploitation film contributes to the image of individuals with socially distributed skills, while wealth is distributed between social and racial castes. The permeability of the two universes provides material for plots that denounce and ultimately condemn those who dare to break free from their social condition or their geographical and racial affiliation. This geography of justice focuses on a few favorite locations.

In Stuart Baird's *Executive Decision* (1996), Arab terrorists hijack a civilian plane and plan to detonate a bomb over New York. Whether in the disaster film or the science fiction film (although the two genres tend to intersect frequently), New York

⁷ *Coma* (Michael Crichton; 1978), *The ambulance* (Larry Cohen; 1990), *Extreme Measures* (Michael Apted; 1996)

becomes a symbolic, cathartic issue. The future of the United States is at stake. These films, like *The Siege* (Edward Zwick, 1997), warn against the loss of democracy and individual freedom, the founding principles of the American nation. In the foreground, the Statue of Liberty is a bulwark against fear and the unknown. It's hardly surprising that this monument should feature in many films (*Planet of the Apes, New York 1997*)⁸, *Ghostbusters 2*, *X-Men*). In addition to this highly symbolic location, the UN headquarters and the World Trade Center are other places that are often called upon as the focus of national or international crises: *The Peacemaker* (Mimi Leder, 1997), *The Interpreter* (Sidney Pollack, 2005); *25 Hours* (Spike Lee, 2002) and *Munich* (Steven Spielberg, 2006).

In the exploitation films of the 70s and 80s, New York City is a mythical place, its gigantic buildings lending the city a titanic power in which the allusion to biblical morality is never far away ('Gold told me to' is the mantra of the god-crazed snipers in an astonishing film by Larry Cohen (*Gold told me to*, 1976). This moralistic vision of the city can be seen in two of Sidney Lumet's movies focusing on police corruption: *Serpico* (1974) and *Prince of the City* (1981). The themes of political corruption and stock market manipulation were not unique to the exploitation films of the '70s; they would later provide the material for more ambitious films on the subject, produced by Hollywood studios: *Copland*, *City Hall*, *People I Know*, *Gang of New York*; *Wall Street*; etc). On the other hand, the vast majority of these films use the figure of the double: on the one hand, Apollo (the formation of intellect, morality, and nobility) and, on the other, Dionysus (the god of revelry and the satisfaction of buried impulses, even of corrupting evil). The confrontation between these two figures is presented as inevitable. It will be meaningful at the end of a final battle, as in *Year of the Dragon* (Michael Cimino, 1985) or *Blue Steel* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1989). Of course, while the vast majority

⁸ The irony of the film is made all the more grating by the fact that Manhattan is presented as a gigantic "garbage prison".

⁹ In the film's final sequence, the Statue of Liberty is used as a saving weapon, striking with its 'arm' a kind of evil pink plasma that had the power to make the population inherently evil (aggression, incivility, criminality). It's hard to appreciate the subtle irony of this family product written by two comedians, Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis, who ultimately turn the Statue of Liberty into a purifying angel.

of these films play on this duality head-on, whatever their register (fantasy or realist), other filmmakers such as Martin Scorsese (*Taxi Driver*, 1975) or Abel Ferrara (*MS 45*, *Fear City*, *China Girl*) have not hesitated to paint ambiguous and tragic figures, characteristic of the criminal film or film noir (insofar as they are often victims devoured by the fantastic nebula of the Big Apple).

3. New York, the global capital of insecurity: an apology for self-defense cinema

While blockbusters ingeniously turn New York into the site of a telluric battle, and prestige films from Hollywood studios summon up the arsenal of great humanist causes, exploitation cinema is quick to highlight the most prominent fears of the tremendous urban metropolises through two sub-genres: the vigilante film and the *rape and revenge*, both of which became fashionable at the time of the success of the *Death Wish* series starring Charles Bronson (1974-1995). Built around the theme of chronic insecurity in America's big cities, as the opening credits of *Death Wish 2* show, these films also function as a distorting mirror of delinquency and gangs, precariousness (the tramp appears in these productions as a nightmarish figure), prostitution, racism, and xenophobia. Traditional reference points are deliberately blurred since, in such a context, the usually reassuring figure of the police officer can be seen on the screen as a monstrous figure, as in Abel Ferrara's *Bad Lieutenant* (1991) and especially in William Lustig's *Maniac Cop* series (1988-1995). And it's not uncommon to find most of these elements in the same exploitation film. In *Death Wish 3*, Charles Bronson takes to the streets with a World War II-era rocket launcher and machine gun. He is aided in his purifying crusade by a militia of armed *vigilantes* whose aim is to 'cleanse' the city of its youth gangs. Suppose the figure of the double (the hero versus his nemesis) is a clever way, especially for ideologically acceptable A-movies. In that case, the representation of the vigilante is also that of extreme, radical characters. In *Gold Hold*

to Me (Larry Cohen, 1976), anonymous citizens are struck by a quasi-mystical revelation and senselessly murder passers-by from the top of buildings. In a psychological thriller written by Larry Cohen and directed by Joël Schumacher, *Phone Booth* (2002), an arrogant, amoral executive (Colin Farrel) was ambushed by an invisible sniper (Kiefer Sutherland) in a phone booth and, under threat of execution, had to atone for his sins in public. The mad sniper appears as a purifying angel, sweeping away all the physical and moral corruption of the modern metropolis. This idea is strongly present in many New York films and will undoubtedly be at the origin of the vigilante film. The sense of impunity (for criminals and their delinquent youth), the chronic impotence and inefficiency of the police and the judiciary system (in William Lustig's *Vigilante*, the child-murdering hoodlums are released at their trial for lack of tangible evidence¹⁰. These movies reflect anxiety-provoking fears. The extreme brutality of the situation leads residents to authorize acceptable alternatives (purifying angels, vigilantes, armed militias, etc.) and reprehensible solutions as miracle cures.

To understand how a genre as ambiguous as vigilante cinema could stigmatize the figure of the youth to the point of confusing it with the figure of the delinquent, we need to go back a few decades. In the 40s and 50s, film noir and crime films channeled the main archetypes of urban decadence. New York played a leading role in this respect, providing the backdrop for a whole gallery of characters on the bangs of normality. In the mid-50s, the juvenile delinquent emerged as a new figure on the fringes of society. In the significant crime films (*Dead End*, William Wyler, 1939; *Angel with Dirty Faces*, Michael Curtiz, 1938), the teenager was still, in the 50s, a figure who escaped ideological recuperation. Although the theme of New York teenagers' rise to gangster status was addressed in numerous crime films such as *China Girl* (Abel Ferrara, 1987); *Once Upon in America* (Sergio Leone, 1983); *State of Grace* (Phil Joanou, 1990); *Sleepers* (Barry Levinson, 1996), gritty films seized on this phenomenon,

¹⁰ It's the main subject of Peter Hyams' 1983 A-movie *The Star Chambers*, in which the judge, played by Michael Douglas, is invited to join the ranks of a strange legal chamber to re-judge criminals acting with impunity.

irrigating grindhouses for B-movies and Z-movies that became sub-genres, with their codes and archetypes: Hell's Angels, biker movies, horror movies. The various forms of New York delinquency are expressed in extreme ways, to say the least: vigilante movies¹¹ Rape and Vengeance¹², Survival Films¹³, Vetsploitation¹⁴, Blaxploitation¹⁵, Nukesploitation¹⁶, Gangploitation¹⁷, Horror movies¹⁸, exploitation thrillers¹⁹, and above all gang movies, set in New York²⁰. Gang movies will impact durably New Hollywood A-movies.

4. Inspiring New Hollywood movies

During the 70's, in the context of New Hollywood (or "Silver Age"), A-movies also often exploited the image of New York City as a reflection of social tensions and internal conflicts with directors such as Woody Allen or Martin Scorsese. This use of the city was a way to symbolize the characters' existential struggles, identity crises, and the sociological changes in American society at that time. Films such as *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), directed by John Schlesinger, with Dustin Hoffman; *Taxi Driver* (1976) by

¹¹ *Defiance* (John Flynn; 1972), *Vigilante* (William Lustig ;1983), *The Star Chamber* (Peter Hyams ; 1983).

¹² *MS.45* (Abel Ferrara; 1981), *Class 1984* (Mark Lester; 1982).

¹³ *The Warriors* (Walter Hill; 1978), *Judgment Night* (Stephen Hopkins; 1993).

¹⁴ *Cab Driver* (Martin Scorsese; 1974), *The Exterminator* (James Glickenhaus; 1980), *Rolling Thunder* (John Flynn; 1974), *10 to midnight* (Jack Lee Thompson; 1983).

¹⁵ *Shaft* (Gordon Parks; 1971), *Coffy* (Jack Hill; 1973), *Foxy Brown* (Jack Hill; 1972), *Black Caesar* (Larry Cohen; 1973), *Hell up in Harlem* (Larry Cohen; 1973), *Coonskin* (Ralph Bakshi; 1975).

¹⁶ *New York 1997* (John Carpenter; 1981), *The omega man* (Boris Sagal; 1971), *The ultimate warrior* (Robert Clouse; 1975), *Soleynt Green* (Richard Fleischer; 1973).

¹⁷ *The Wanderers* (Philip Kaufman; 1979), *The Warriors* (Walter Hill; 1978), *Vigilante* (William Lustig; 1983).

¹⁸ *Driller Killer* (Abel Ferrara; 1979), *Blue Sunshine* (Jeff Lieberman; 1977), *The sentinel* (Michael Winner; 1977), *Maniac* (William Lustig; 1980), *Basket Case* (Frank Henenlotter; 1981), *Maniac Cop 1, 2, 3* (William Lustig; 1988, 1990, 1993), *The New-York Ripper* (Lucio Fulci; 1982), *C.H.U.D* (Douglas Cheek ; 1984), *Brain Damage* (Frank Henenlotter ; 1988), *The ambulance* (Larry Cohen ; 1989).

¹⁹ *Across 110 th street* (Barry Shear; 1972), *The policeman* (Daniel Petrie; 1980), *Nighthawk* (Bruce Malmuth; 1981), *Out for justice* (John Flynn; 1991).

²⁰ *Blackboard Jungle* (Richard Brooks, 1955), *Somedbody up there likes me* (Robert Wise, 1955) and *West Side Story* (Robert Wise, 1961) are all pioneering films.

Martin Scorsese, starring Robert De Niro and Jodie Foster; *The French Connection* (1971, starring Gene Hackman) and *Cruising* (1980, starring Al Pacino), both by William Friedkin; as well as *Mean Street* (1973) by Martin Scorsese, starring Robert De Niro; illustrate how New York City was used as a central element to explore universal themes such as isolation, violence, corruption, and the quest for identity. These themes permeate this period, connecting obscure gritty movies and New Hollywood respectable productions:

- a. *Isolation and Social Marginalization*: New York is often depicted as a ruthless city where individuals feel lost and isolated. In his study on urban alienation, the post-Baudrillard Richard Sennett (1977) argues that large cities like New York foster social isolation due to their size and complexity, which is reflected in the characters' experiences in *Klute* by Alan J. Pakula (1971) for which Jane Fonda won the Best Actress Oscar for her portrayal of the Manhattan call girl Bree Daniels, who continues to turn tricks despite there being a killer on the loose; *Midnight Cowboy* by John Schlesinger (1969) with Dustin Hoffman; and *Taxi Driver*²¹. This later film explores the psyche of a Vietnam War veteran, portrayed by Robert De Niro, who becomes a nighttime taxi driver in New York City. The main character, deeply disturbed, feels alienated and seeks to cleanse society of its corruption.

- b. *The films highlight the violence and corruption in the streets of New York*. According to scholars such as James Sanders (2009) or Frédéric Gimello-Mesplomb (2007), the city's representation in *The French Connection* (1971, starring Gene Hackman) and "*Cruising*" (1980, starring Al Pacino), both directed by William Friedkin, reflects the era's concerns about urban crime and

²¹ Richard Sennett, *The fall of public man*. New York: Knopf, 1977.

moral decay, as storytelled in *Shaft* directed by Gordon Parks (1971)²².

- c. *Quest for Identity and Search for Meaning*: The film's characters often seek to define themselves in a constantly evolving urban environment. Gangster movies like *Mean Streets* by Martin Scorsese (1973) illustrate several individuals struggling to find meaning in their lives as tragic heroes in a chaotic urban world. *Panic in Needle Park* is a 1971 film directed by Jerry Schatzberg and starring Al Pacino in one of his early roles. The movie revolves around the lives of Bobby (Pacino) and Helen (Kitty Winn), two young heroin addicts living in New York City's "Needle Park" (Sheridan Square, also known as "Sheridan Square Triangle" or "Needle Park"), a hangout for drug users. The film portrays their relationship as it spirals into deeper addiction and the challenges they face in the harsh realities of drug abuse. The title refers to the panic that ensues when a large amount of drugs hits the streets, leading to increased law enforcement activity and addiction-related issues among users. The film is known for its gritty portrayal of addiction and its impact on individuals and their relationships.
- d. *The City's Transformation as a Mirror of Social Transformations*: The films also reflect the physical transformation of New York, especially in the 1960s and 1970s. According to David Harvey in his post-Baudrillard essay *The Condition of Postmodernity* (2008), the urban transformations of NYC during this period had a profound impact on the city's social and cultural life, reflected in the films of the time²³. The image of New York City is both a realistic and symbolic way to explore these themes.

²² James Sanders, *Celluloid Skyline: New York and the Movies*. NY : A.A. Knopf, 2009 ; Frédéric Gimello-Mesplomb, *Le cinéma des Années Reagan : un modèle hollywoodien ?* Paris : Nouveau monde, 2007.

²³ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity. An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford : Blackwell, 1989.

5. Surviving in post-apocalyptic New York: A brief sociology of NYC post-nuke Movies

The *nukeploitation* film category was very much in vogue in the early 1980s, following the consecutive success of *The Warriors* (Walter Hill, 1978), *The Road Warrior* (George Miller, 1981), and *New York 1997* (John Carpenter, 1981), *post-atomic* films set in a deliberately vague period. The society depicted is that of men who, following an apocalyptic event - it could also be a form of social apocalypse in which the street has taken over from the law - revert to a savage, brutal state. Social structures are rebuilt around small communities of survivors, the size of which depends essentially on the number of extras the film's budget can afford - rarely more than twenty or so. "Post-nuke" films remain the preferred domain of American Z productions, today plebiscited by niche cinephilia over Internet²⁴: *Robot Holocaust* (Charles Band, 1980); *Gangland 2010* (Art Camacho, 2000) as well as a few Italian B movies represent New York through a disenchanted vision (*2019: After the fall of New York* (Sergio Martino, 1983); *Bronx Warriors 1 and 2* (Enzo G. Castellari, 1982 and 1983); *Rats: Night of Terror* (Bruno Mattei, 1983). Of course, the anticipationist argument (a future only a few years away: 1997 for Carpenter, 2010 for Art Camacho, 2019 for Sergio Martino...) hardly holds water and, in the vast majority of cases, serves as a pretext for the accumulation of highly violent action scenes, evoking for the spectator a disturbing reality that is already being lived in the present. By playing on the excess typical of anticipation films, post-nuke movies offer a prominent outlet for the viewer, who can quickly identify the figures of otherness recognizable by their accouterments, modes of expression, and racial and social origins. A recurring feature of most urban exploitation

²⁴ Arnaud Moschenross, Frédéric Gimello-Mesplomb, Jean-Valère Cossu. "Pour tout (sa)voir, cliquez ici !" : Cinéphilie de niche, forums spécialisés, et stratégies de prescription des films sur Internet. Colloque : La prescription culturelle en question / Investigating Cultural Expertise, Apr 2017, Dijon, France. (halshs-01877521). Voir aussi Frédéric Gimello-Mesplomb. "Some epistemological considerations about the theories of film and cultural consumption in the Internet age: revisiting superstardom models, long tail phenomenon and quality appraisal". Wojciech Dyduch, Małgorzata Pańkowska (eds.). Internet Communication Management, Publishing House of the University of Economics in Katowice, pp.105-115, 2012, ISBN : 978-83-7246-776-8. (halshs-01941669)

films set in New York is the stigmatization of fear of aliens, as in *Brothers from Another Planet* (John Sayles, 1982). The alien is rejected above all because he is a black man from Harlem and a homeless one at that.

Most exploitation films do not burden themselves with critical discourse; however, some works demonstrate an astonishing observation of New York society. In *The Warriors* (Walter Hill, 1978), the central couple meets two other couples on a subway train, obviously from more affluent backgrounds. Coming from the same city and of the same age, they are nonetheless very different and are reduced to observing each other in an icy face-off. The hasty departure of the yuppie couples seals this impotence in generational communication. In this film, the confrontation between two opposing worlds seems inevitable, even if it's more of an ideological class confrontation. The clash of cultures and differences in social conditions is all the more striking because it is so much a part of the narrative in these films. Other films also play on this theme. In *Class 1984* (Mark Lester, 1982), a hard-boiled version of *Blackboard Jungle* (Richard Brooks, 1955), Perry King plays a music teacher (visibly sensitive to left-wing ideas, as evidenced by his dialogue with Roddy McDowall) confronted by a gang of nihilistic punks in his high school. Charles Bronson plays an architect in the first *Death Wish* (Michael Winner, 1974). His profession is all the more symbolic in that he works for the good of the community, participating in good faith in the sprawling expansion of big cities (but also unwittingly in creating the ghetto complexes that will ironically be the source of his various setbacks). This confrontation takes a more warlike, reactionary turn when exploitation films feature a New York vigilante who happens to be a Vietnam veteran (hence the term *vetsploitation*). In *The Exterminator* (James Glickenhaus, 1980), Robert Ginty plays a former soldier who, after a few years, meets up with another veteran (Steve James) and decides to avenge his death. In a similar vein, actor William Devane in *Rolling Thunder* (1977, a singular movie by *Taxi Driver* screenwriter Paul Schrader) is portrayed as one of exploitation's most disturbed characters: neurotic, suicidal, paranoid, and obsessed with weapons. On the other hand, when exploitation

intersects with blaxploitation, the discourse changes tone. It stigmatizes African Americans more, who are reduced to becoming potential criminals by robbing a bank in *Dead Presidents* (Albert & Allen Hughes, 1995), for example. The great strength of exploitation cinema is its ability to be "in direct contact" with the events and themes depicted. Take a close look at most of these films. You'll notice that they are primarily artisanal and offer the advantage of providing viewers with authentic, "real" New York sets, as well as amateur actors recruited off the street on the day of shooting and who have a New York accent, which is essential given the commercial exploitation, which is also highly localized. Films such as *Maniac* (William Lustig, 1980) or *Basket Case* (Frank Henenlotter, 1981) were filmed without any authorization from the authorities (resulting in location changes and numerous splicing errors).

6. The Decline of New York Exploitation Cinema and the rise of a Neo-positivist Portrait of New York

The early 1990s marked the decline of New York exploitation cinema as the video market expanded and grindhouses became obsolete. By the mid-1990s, grindhouses had completely disappeared from major cities in the United States, notably from Broadway and Times Square (New York), Hollywood Boulevard (Los Angeles), and Market Street (San Francisco). Politicians also recognized the impact of these films and implemented measures to address urban insecurity. Rudolph Giuliani, the Republican candidate for mayor of New York in 1990, campaigned on a platform focused on fighting crime, unemployment, and budgetary control²⁵. Giuliani was best known for championing the reduction of urban insecurity, with the adoption of the "crime bill" in New York a year after his election, in August 1994, by the Democrats of the Clinton administration. Among the measures of this vast program, the "Three Strikes and You're Out" rule, inspired by baseball rules, was undoubtedly the most

²⁵ Lawrence M. Friedman, *Crime and Punishment in American History*, Basic Books Harper Collins Publishers, 1993, p. 152.

spectacular.²⁶ Although its application was often controversial, the results of Giuliani's policies led to a significant change in New York's social fabric, with shopkeepers taking back control of the downtown areas, the development of the Northeast, and the opening up of specific neighborhoods through the integration of educational and cultural programs (the municipal culture budget tripled under Giuliani's mandate). Several films deal with this period, painting a neopositivist vision of NYC leaving life²⁷, in contrast to exploitation films. One is *Music of the Heart* (1999), a drama film directed by Wes Craven. It tells the true story of Roberta Guaspari, a violin teacher in East Harlem whose program provides free violin classes to children in the NYC community. The film stars Meryl Streep as Guaspari and features Aidan Quinn, Gloria Estefan, and Angela Bassett in supporting roles. Even if *Music of the Heart* explores themes of dedication, passion, and the transformative power of music education in the lives of young students, this drama sometimes fails to avoid clichés. *School of Rock* (2003) is a comedy starring Jack Black as Dewey Finn, a down-on-his-luck musician who pretends to be a substitute teacher at a prestigious prep school. Instead of teaching the regular curriculum, Dewey forms a rock band with his young students to compete in a Battle of the Bands competition. Along the way, Dewey helps the students discover their musical talents and boosts their confidence.

Gotham City is the domain of Batman in American comic books published by DC Comics. For the first time, this is where Gotham City was identified as Batman's primary residence (Batman No. 4, December 1940) and has remained the backdrop for most of his stories since then. This turns it into an imaginary urban universe with such things as superheroes like Green Lantern, Black Canary, the Justice League, and

²⁶ M.A. Combesque and I. Warde, *Mythologies américaines*, éditions du Félin, 1996, page 65-66.

²⁷ Frédéric Gimello-Mesplomb. *The Meaning of 'Quality' in Feature Film Policy Selective Aid Scheme : A French/UK Cross-Cultural Perspective*. NECS–European Network for Cinema and Media Studies International Conference (CinEcoSA Panel 'Film Policies, Turning Points in Film History'), European Network for Cinema and Media Studies; Saint Charles University, Prague, Jun 2013, Prague, Czech Republic. (halshs-01884042)

Anarchy. Almost all the references of DC Comics further place Gotham City in New Jersey. Over time, the look and feel of Gotham City have also been influenced by New York City which lies next to New Jersey and Chicago. Further, the FOX TV series “Gotham,” starring Benjamin McKenzie and Donal Logue, will also incorporate all the characteristic elements of NYC-based exploitation movies and vigilante films. A way to remind us that cinematic representations of New York are constantly being renewed, but their novelty often takes root in the underground of the viewers' imagination, which was built and shaped by the inventiveness of New York films from the 70s and 80s.

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Selected filmography

Director	Title	year
John Flynn	Defiance	1972
William Lustig	Vigilante	1983
Peter Hyams	The Star Chamber	1983
Abel Ferrara	MS.45	1981
Mark Lester	Class 1984	1982

Walter Hill	The Warriors	1978
Stephen Hopkins	Judgment Night	1993
James Glickenhaus	The Exterminator	1980
John Flynn	Rolling Thunder	1974
Jack Lee Thompson	10 to midnight	1983
Gordon Parks	Shaft	1971
Jack Hill	Coffy	1973
Jack Hill	Foxy Brown	1972
Larry Cohen	Black Caesar	1973
Larry Cohen	Hell up in Harlem	1973
Ralph Bakshi	Coonskin	1975
John Carpenter	New York 1997	1981
Boris Sagal	The omega man	1971
Robert Clouse	The ultimate warrior	1975
Richard Fleischer	Soleynt Green	1973

Philip Kaufman	The Wanderers	1979
Abel Ferrara	Driller Killer	1979
Jeff Lieberman	Blue Sunshine	1977
Michael Winner	The sentinel	1977
William Lustig	Maniac	1980
Frank Henenlotter	Basket Case	1981
William Lustig	Maniac Cop 1	1988
William Lustig	Maniac Cop 2	1990
William Lustig	Maniac Cop 3	1993
Lucio Fulci	The New-York Ripper	1982
Douglas Cheek	C.H.U.D	1984
Frank Henenlotter	Brain Damage	1988
Larry Cohen	The ambulance	1989
Barry Shear	Across 110th street	1972
Daniel Petrie	The policeman	1980

Bruce Malmuth	Nighthawk	1981
John Flynn	Out for justice	1991
Richard Brooks	Blackboard Jungle	1955
Robert Wise	Somebody up there likes me	1955
Robert Wise	West Side Story	1961
William Friedkin	The French Connection	1971
William Friedkin	Cruising	1980
Martin Scorsese	Mean Streets	1973
Jerry Schatzberg	Panic in Needle Park	1971
Douglas Cheek	C.H.U.D.	1985
Jim Muro	Street Trash	1986
Stuart Baird	Executive Decision	1996
Edward Zwick	The Siege	1997
Sidney Pollack	The Interpreter	2005
Spike Lee	25 Hours	2002

Steven Spielberg	Munich	2006
Sidney Lumet	Serpico	1974
Sidney Lumet	Prince of the City	1981
John Schlesinger	Midnight Cowboy	1969
Martin Scorsese	Taxi Driver	1976
Alan J. Pakula	Klute	1971
George Miller	The Road Warrior	1981
Sergio Martino	2019: After the Fall of New York	1983
Enzo G. Castellari	Bronx Warriors	1982
Bruno Mattei	Rats: Night of Terror	1983
John Sayles	Brothers from Another Planet	1982
Michael Winner	Death Wish	1974
Paul Schrader	Rolling Thunder	1977
Albert & Allen Hughes	Dead Presidents	1995
Wes Craven	Music of the Heart	1999

Richard Linklater	School of Rock	2003
Jack Lee Thompson	Messenger of Death	1988
Joseph Sargent	The Taking of Pelham One Two Three	1974
Don Siegel	Coogan's Bluff	1968
Larry Cohen	Gold Told Me To	1976
Michael Cimino	Year of the Dragon	1985
Kathryn Bigelow	Blue Steel	1989
Joel Schumacher	Phone Booth	2002
Charles Band	Robot Holocaust	1980
Art Camacho	Gangland 2010	2000